

Statement of John T. Shannon**State Forester of Arkansas
On Behalf of the National Association of State Foresters****Before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Resources Subcommittees on
Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans
Forests and Forest Health
National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands****March 14, 2002****SUBJECT****H. R. 3558, the Species Protection and Conservation of the Environment Act****INTRODUCTION**

On behalf of the National Association of State Foresters (NASF), I am pleased that Chairman Gilchrest and Chairman McInnis have asked us to testify on this bill. NASF is a non-profit organization that represents the directors of the State Forestry agencies from all fifty states, eight U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia. The State Foresters manage and protect state and private forests across the U.S., which together encompass two-thirds of the nation's forests.

I am representing NASF in my role as Chairman of the Forest Health Protection Committee. The spread of harmful non-native species is an important issue to the State Foresters, private landowners, and our partners. NASF applauds the efforts undertaken in this bill to address the pervasive problem of invasive species on both public and private lands. We support the bill, and believe that it can be strengthened even more.

In this testimony, I would like to address the topics you raised in your invitation to testify: (1) the need for the measure; (2) whether it can become an effective mechanism to deal with the growing problem of invasive species on public and private lands; (3) if the proposed funding levels are adequate to address this problem; and (4) our recommendations on any proposed changes that could improve this proposal.

NEED

There is clearly a call for measures to control, mitigate, and eradicate invasive species on forestland and elsewhere. Invasive species are a growing concern among foresters and other land managers. Indeed, addressing the spread of exotics is one of the objectives of the NASF Forest Health Protection Committee, and it is of high priority for the Committee this year. We agree with the inclusion of U.S. Territories and Tribal lands in the definition of "state" as these lands have specific needs for control of nonnative invasive species.

EFFECTIVENESS

This bill provides an important mechanism to deal with the growing problem of invasive species, and we

believe it can be strengthened in several critical ways.

Emphasize Role of State and Local Government

State forestry and other state and local agencies play key roles in invasive species management. State forestry agencies, in particular, have longstanding relationships with private landowners and federal partners, and we can assist in the development of priorities and selection of grantees. Our technical experts on the ground, who interact daily with private landowners, have first-hand understanding of local needs and solid relationships with landowners and local government officials. This places state forestry agencies in an ideal position to help ensure that on the ground management stemming from this bill will be effective in dealing with invasive species when and where they threaten forested habitats.

Expand Involvement of Federal Agencies

If we are to successfully tackle the problem of invasive species, we need to devote resources to those federal lands and programs where the greatest progress on the ground can be made. Most importantly, the bill must include the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), specifically the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), as key partners. The USFS, one of our traditional partners, has an excellent Forest Health Protection Unit that deals with invasive species issues on forested land. The USFS is also home to Cooperative Forestry, a vital link between private landowners and cost share assistance that funds management on private land. Invasive species remain core management issues for the National Forest System and Research and Development within the USFS, as well. Likewise, APHIS, which has a rapid response program in place, has the capacity to quickly detect and respond to exotic pests that threaten agricultural crops and natural habitats. In addition to the National Wildlife Refuge System, there are other lands managed by the Department of Interior, and also Department of Defense lands, which contain habitats threatened or affected by invasive nonnative species. It is essential to identify these federal agencies as partners in this legislation.

Building upon existing federal programs that deal with invasive species issues, and encouraging agencies that control large amounts of public land to participate, will most effectively address harmful nonnative species across public and private lands. We need the flexibility to detect and rapidly respond to invasive species when and where they occur, and limiting the demonstration projects to wildlife refuges, which is a small geographic subset of federal lands, may not ensure that our limited federal dollars will be spent in the most effective and efficient manner.

Keep Grants Accessible / Keep Administration Simple

The process of applying for, reviewing, and administering grants must be as simple as possible. If grants are too demanding, key applicants will not apply for these much needed funds. Our experience has shown us that some states, especially in the South, lack adequate staffing and other resources necessary to participate in the programs identified in this bill. In order to achieve the greatest good on the ground, the requirements of the bill must provide accessibility to all partners.

In addition, we believe the Aldo Leopold Native Heritage Grant Program would be more effective if the requirement for a federal partner were expanded to allow projects with either state or federal partners. Quick and aggressive action on state and private lands could actually prevent the spread of invasive species to federal lands. The requirement that grants may only be issued for projects with adjacent federal lands or waters may disqualify important projects.

Broaden Scope of State Assessments

NASF recommends broadening the State Native Species Protection Assessment Grant Program to allow and encourage the states to assess the impacts of invasive species on the broad range of sectors that contribute to their own states' economy and the national economy, rather than just impacts to native habitats. Our experience at both the state and national level has shown that a broad range of sectors (e.g., agriculture, tourism, and transportation) contribute to the propagation and spread of invasive species. These sectors hold the promise for innovative and incentive-driven solutions, and these constituents should be at the table in developing state, regional, and national assessments and solutions. The preparation of statewide assessments will help identify strategic regional approaches to priority invasive species. This will also bring more public support for the investments needed to tackle invasive species problems over the long run—all of which will help native habitats. State assessments will be helpful to states and regions that have not already conducted assessments. However, to effectively address the protection of natural habitats and processes, a broader assessment of the risk from invasive nonnative species is needed, which may include altered habitats such as reservoirs or other lands and waters that are no longer in a natural condition.

Expand Definition of Environmental Soundness

Defining 'environmental soundness' as only projects that emphasize non-chemical measures may restrict the control and eradication of some invasive species, especially plants. It is important to recognize that, in some cases, chemicals provide the most effective and environmentally sound technique for control and eradication.

Recognize Invasive Species are Long Term Problems

Long term programs with ongoing funding are needed if we are to successfully control, mitigate, and eradicate harmful nonnative species on public and private lands. The two to four year limit for grants, along with the 2008 sunset for the Act, do not provide the levels of continuous public investment that are needed to fully address these problems. This is due to both the extended survival or dormancy of seeds and the continuous threat of new species introductions from overseas.

FUNDING

NASF believes this bill will improve efforts to take action on the ground in areas where the problems of invasive species are most prevalent, if we can focus primarily on rapid action. When management actions are hampered by assessment processes, the problems associated with invasive species intensify. The successful management and control of invasive species requires the ability to quickly and aggressively respond to emerging threats. We would like to see a greater proportion of funding directed towards the Rapid Response Program and the Aldo Leopold Grants Program, where on the ground management happens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, NASF believes that this bill provides an effective mechanism for dealing with the growing problem of invasive species on public and private lands and waters, and it will be strengthened through the following recommendations:

- Emphasize the important role that state and local government can play in setting priorities and selecting grantees.
- Expand the involvement of federal agencies within the U.S. Department of Agriculture that have expertise and programs in invasive species management to include the USFS and APHIS.
- Expand the involvement of federal agencies and departments controlling large acreages of public land, including the Bureau of Land Management and other land management agencies in the U.S. Department of Interior, the USFS in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Department of Defense.
- Keep the requirements for the programs as simple as possible, which will encourage the participation of states and other key partners.
- Broaden the scope of state assessments to include the impact of invasive nonnative species on states' economies and altered lands that are no longer in a natural condition.
- Expand the definition of 'environmental soundness' to include the use of chemicals where needed to control and eradicate invasive species.
- Along with considering reauthorization of the bill in 2008, we encourage you to extend grants beyond the two to four year limitation currently detailed in the bill.
- Shift the balance of funding towards on the ground management, particularly the Rapid Response program. There is value in being ready to handle outbreaks of invasive species before they occur.

CONCLUSION

NASF looks forward to the opportunity to work with the Subcommittees and the sponsors to develop and carry out an effective program to address the spread and control of nonnative species. We commend representatives Rahall, Gilchrest, and Underwood for your work on this important legislation. We are willing to work with you to refine specific language as the bill progresses, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and answer your questions today.